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Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is the sixth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). It provides a comprehensive assessment of the steps taken to implement resolution 1701 (2006) since the last report of the Secretary-General was issued on 30 October 2007 (S/2007/641), and highlights both continuing progress on the implementation of this resolution and areas of concern that continue to impede the establishment of a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution between the parties.

2. I am pleased to report that both the Governments of Lebanon and Israel express continued commitment to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). Only the enduring commitment of the parties to all the provisions of the resolution, without selectivity, will create the required basis for a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the Lebanese Armed Forces have continued their work to ensure that the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River is not utilized for hostile activities and that it is free of any unauthorized armed personnel, assets and weapons. The cooperation between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces has increased during the reporting period, as manifested by the augmentation of coordinated operations in fulfilment of relevant provisions of resolution 1701 (2006). This cooperation has contributed significantly to the general calm that continues to prevail in the UNIFIL area of operations. However, I am concerned by a number of serious incidents that occurred place during the reporting period and have raised the level of tension in the area.

3. During the reporting period, Lebanon remained in the grip of an intense political crisis, which has impeded the normal functioning of the legitimate constitutional institutions. At the centre of the crisis is the election of a new President, a position that has remained vacant since 24 November 2007. The prolonged political deadlock has generated violent confrontations between the opposing parties that has led to a number of fatalities and injuries. Efforts to reach an agreement by Lebanese and international parties are ongoing. However, owing to regional interests intermingled with Lebanese internal dynamics, these efforts have yet to bear fruit.

4. The continuation of targeted assassinations in Lebanon has added to tensions throughout the country. The scope of targets has widened to include UNIFIL outside

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of its area of operations, the army, the security forces and the diplomatic community. On 12 December 2007, an explosion killed General Francois el-Hajj of the Lebanese Armed Forces along with his driver. On 25 January 2008, Major Wissam Eid, of the Internal Security Forces, was killed along with five others and 20 people were injured. On 15 January 2008, an explosion apparently targeted a vehicle of the Embassy of the United States of America in Lebanon, leaving three people dead and wounding dozens. These terrorist attacks pose a serious threat to the security and stability of Lebanon and threaten its very sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence.

5. As indicated above, the situation prevailing in Lebanon during the reporting period has greatly complicated efforts to achieve further progress on key aspects of resolution 1701 (2006).

II. Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006)

A. Respect for the Blue Line

6. The military and security situation in the UNIFIL area of operations has been generally stable since the submission of my last report on 30 October 2007 (S/2007/641). The parties continue to pledge their commitment to upholding the cessation of hostilities. Nevertheless, there were a number of serious incidents during the reporting period, which have raised tension in the area of operations, particularly at some known points of friction along the Blue Line. These incidents constitute violations of resolution 1701 (2006) and undermine UNIFIL efforts to build trust and confidence between the parties and with the population of southern Lebanon.

7. On 8 January 2008, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNIFIL that two rockets had hit the northern Israeli town of Shelomi, causing minor damage to the main road and a house, but no injuries. The Israel Defense Forces, the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL did not detect the firing or the impact of rockets and there was no explosion on impact. Despite multiple joint searches by UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces, no trace of a launching site has been discovered. To date, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack. The Israel Defense Forces insisted that the rockets were launched from Lebanese territory across the Blue Line. The Lebanese Armed Forces maintained that no rockets were launched from Lebanese territory. UNIFIL, in close cooperation with the Israel Defense Forces and the Lebanese Armed Forces, has been investigating the incident and efforts to ascertain all the facts are ongoing. A preliminary investigation report was provided to the parties on 11 January 2008. If the rockets were launched from Lebanese territory, as is likely, the incident would constitute a serious violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and a breach of the cessation of hostilities agreement.

8. The investigation of the Lebanese Armed Forces into the 17 June 2007 rocket attack against Israel (see S/2007/392) is still ongoing. At this point, there are no new developments to report. I urge the Lebanese authorities to do their utmost to identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice.

9. On two separate occasions, on 9 November 2007 and 3 February 2008, Lebanese civilians were involved in criminal operations to smuggle illegal

substances and commercial goods from Lebanon into Israel. Both incidents occurred in the area of the village of Ghajar. On 9 November 2007, two individuals were detected by the Israel Defense Forces after they crossed the Blue Line. The Israel Defense Forces opened fire, wounded and subsequently arrested both individuals south of the Blue Line. They remain in the custody of the Israeli authorities. In addition, another suspect remains in the custody of the Lebanese Armed Forces, along with a possible accomplice. UNIFIL completed its investigation into the incident and submitted its findings and conclusions to the parties.

10. On 3 February 2008, an IDF patrol opened fire and wounded two Lebanese civilians who were suspected of conducting smuggling activities and had entered the area occupied by Israel around Ghajar village, north of the Blue Line. One of the individuals subsequently died and UNIFIL has been informed that the injured individual is in the custody of the Lebanese Armed Forces. The UNIFIL investigation to ascertain the facts is ongoing. This incident underlines the urgent requirement to complete the full withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from the northern part of the village of Ghajar and the surrounding area, in accordance with resolution 1701 (2006).

11. These two incidents around Ghajar reinforce the vital importance of the liaison and coordination arrangements agreed between UNIFIL and the two parties, and highlight, in particular, the importance of a quick exchange of information in preventing illegal activities, such as smuggling operations, on both sides of the Blue Line before such situations can escalate.

12. During the reporting period, there were three different instances of Israel Defense Forces soldiers pointing their weapons in the direction of UNIFIL patrols, with the Israeli soldiers also pointing infrared lasers in one of the instances. UNIFIL is continuing its investigation into an incident that occurred on 13 February 2008, when small arms fire from the Israeli side hit a minefield warning sign in the vicinity of a United Nations mine clearance team operating close to the Blue Line. The Israel Defense Forces informed UNIFIL that it was conducting its own investigation to ascertain the origins of the small arms fire and the circumstances of the incident. On 24 February 2008, a UNIFIL vehicle patrol was blocked by a group of Lebanese civilians for a few hours in the area of operations. I wish to reiterate the obligations of the parties to ensure the safety, security and freedom of movement of UNIFIL and to extend their full cooperation to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

13. On two occasions, on 7 January 2008, in the Shab'a Farms area, and on 18 January 2008, in the vicinity of Ghajar, respectively, the Israel Defense Forces apprehended a Lebanese shepherd for crossing the Blue Line. On the first occasion, after some hours, the shepherd was released through UNIFIL, which subsequently handed him over to the Lebanese authorities. On the basis of the shepherd's statement, the Lebanese Armed Forces later reported to UNIFIL that he had been apprehended by the Israel Defense Forces north of the Blue Line. The Lebanese Armed Forces requested UNIFIL to investigate the incident. However, in the light of the contradictory testimonies received from the parties and the lack of other evidence, UNIFIL has not been able to ascertain the exact location of the incident. On the second occasion, the UNIFIL investigation confirmed that a shepherd had crossed the Blue Line.

14. With regard to all incidents, I urge the parties to cooperate fully with UNIFIL investigations and provide all pertinent information and evidence in a timely manner so that the facts can be quickly established. This will help to reduce tension on the ground and prevent similar incidents in the future.

15. UNIFIL also reported a number of additional minor ground violations by local Lebanese shepherds. As I noted in my last report, such violations, which in some cases may be inadvertent, can lead to accidental incidents and unintended escalation of tension along the Blue Line.

16. I have previously underlined the importance of visibly marking the Blue Line in order to reduce inadvertent violations on the ground and build confidence. I also reported that UNIFIL had initiated a pilot project with the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces to visibly mark a six-kilometre stretch of the Blue Line in the western sector of the area of operations. Two Blue Line barrels are now installed and eight more points have been agreed upon with the parties. It is important to build on this momentum. I urge the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces to remain focused on a practical constructive approach in order to overcome any obstacles to visibly mark the Blue Line, as identified in 2000 by the United Nations. The lessons drawn from the pilot project will eventually assist in finalizing the working paper on the technical procedures for marking the entire Blue Line.

17. Throughout the reporting period, UNIFIL has observed and reported a significant number of Israeli air violations of Lebanese airspace by aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles on an almost daily basis. A particularly high number of air violations were reported on 7 and 11 February 2008, involving large numbers of fighter aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles, over Lebanese territory and its territorial waters. Some of the aircraft were flying at low altitude, including over UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura. In addition, some of the fighter aircraft were flying in tactical formation, performing dogfights and other training manoeuvres, and, on two occasions, employing electronic countermeasures. On 17 February 2008, UNIFIL recorded 36 air violations, mainly by unmanned aerial vehicles. All Israeli overflights of Lebanese territory constitute violations of Lebanese sovereignty and of resolution 1701 (2006). Additionally, air violations inherently escalate tensions and significantly increase the possibility of security incidents, as demonstrated on 1 November 2007 and 21 January 2008, when the Lebanese Armed Forces opened fire on Israeli aircraft violating Lebanese airspace. Air violations can cause unnecessary apprehension among the local population, particularly when conducted at low altitude and in a provocative manner. Moreover, they impede the ability of UNIFIL to work effectively towards further stabilization of the situation by undermining the credibility of the United Nations and the Lebanese authorities.

18. I have continued to voice concern and call on Israel to cease all air violations. My representatives on the ground have done the same. The Government of Lebanon continues to protest these acts as serious violations of Lebanese sovereignty and of resolution 1701 (2006). The Government of Israel maintains that overflights are a necessary security measure that will continue until its two abducted soldiers are released and the measures set out in paragraphs 14 and 15 of resolution 1701 (2006) are implemented in full.

B. Security and liaison arrangements

19. The regular tripartite meetings held by the UNIFIL Force Commander with senior representatives of the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces remain a crucial mechanism to build confidence between the parties. The two sides continue to demonstrate a strong commitment to this forum, which aims to address key security and military operational issues, prevent incidents and violations, and enhance liaison and coordination. The tripartite mechanism is addressing an increasing number of issues, including the findings and conclusions of UNIFIL investigations into incidents. As I stressed in my last report, the range and complexity of the issues makes progress in formulating common understanding at times incremental and slow.

20. Despite intensive efforts, the impasse over the temporary security arrangements for the northern part of the village of Ghajar has not been overcome to date. Continuing control by the Israel Defense Forces of the part of the village north of the Blue Line and a small adjacent area inside Lebanese territory is a source of tension and carries the potential for incidents. The Israel Defense Forces does not maintain permanent positions inside this area, but it has increased its presence and activities over the reporting period. As I stated in previous reports, as long as the Israel Defense Forces remains in northern Ghajar, Israel will not have completed its withdrawal from southern Lebanon, in accordance with its obligations under resolution 1701 (2006). Following extensive bilateral consultations, the UNIFIL Force Commander has presented to the parties new ideas on how to overcome the impasse and facilitate the Israel Defense Forces withdrawal from the area. I urge the parties to take a constructive approach so that this critical and sensitive issue can be resolved as soon as possible. I have noted the latest proposal of the Government of Lebanon in this regard.

21. The area of operations is effectively controlled by the combined presence of UNIFIL and Lebanese Armed Forces troops. UNIFIL maintains 61 permanent positions, 136 observation posts and six temporary checkpoints and observation posts. In addition, UNIFIL continues to conduct an average of 400 vehicle, foot and air patrols, day and night, in any 24-hour period throughout its area of operations in both rural and urban areas. The Lebanese Armed Forces remains deployed in the area of operations with four brigades of different sizes, currently operates more than 100 checkpoints and observation posts, and patrols critical locations in the area south of the Litani River. In maintaining this significant commitment of resources, the Lebanese Armed Forces contributes to improving peace and stability in southern Lebanon, despite being overstretched as a result of additional responsibilities that include manning the border areas and providing security in main Lebanese urban centres, particularly Beirut. On occasion, the Lebanese Armed Forces has had to temporarily redeploy some troops from the UNIFIL area of operations to address such specific security requirements, but this has not had a significant impact on the level of its operations.

22. Coordination and liaison between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces further strengthened during the reporting period, to ensure that the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River is free of unauthorized armed personnel, assets and weapons. Since my last report, coordinated operations have increased, both in number and complexity, resulting in enhanced monitoring and control over the UNIFIL area of operations. On a daily basis, UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed

Forces conduct six coordinated vehicle and three foot patrols, in addition to operating one co-located checkpoint in varying parts of the area of operations. UNIFIL also continued to operate co-located checkpoints with the Lebanese Armed Forces at two crucial entry points into the area of operations on the Litani River, as stated in my last report. At that time, the co-located checkpoints were not operating continuously; however, the one in the eastern sector is now operating on a permanent basis, and the one in the western sector at Qassmiyeh bridge on the coastal road will also soon be operating continuously.

23. Following the rocket incident of 8 January 2008, UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces further intensified their operations to ensure that the area south of the Litani River is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind, by introducing four daily counter-rocket launching operations. These operations comprise coordinated vehicle and foot patrols, temporary observation posts and checkpoints in areas from which rockets could be launched. The operations also include checks of vehicles and people moving in the area, especially during the night hours.

24. Coordinated operations undertaken by UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces during the reporting period resulted in 96 findings of abandoned arms, ammunition and explosive devices. The discoveries included two rocket launchers, 14 120-mm rockets, 76 mortar bombs, seven improvised explosive devices camouflaged as rocks, seven 155-mm shells in a courtyard, in addition to 21 caves or bunkers. There were no signs that the installations had been recently used. The Lebanese Armed Forces continues to destroy or confiscate all arms and ammunition found south of the Litani River.

25. UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces are seeking to ensure that the area south of the Litani River is free of unauthorized armed personnel, assets and weapons, in accordance with resolution 1701 (2006). Recently, an increasing number of armed civilians — hunters and shepherds — have been reported in the area of operations close to the Blue Line.

26. Israel maintains that Hizbullah is significantly rebuilding its military presence and capacity, inside the UNIFIL area of operations. At times, the Israel Defense Forces has provided UNIFIL with information about locations in the UNIFIL area of operations, in which it claims that these activities are taking place. UNIFIL, in collaboration with the Lebanese Armed Forces, immediately investigates all such claims if sufficiently specific information is received. To date, it has found no evidence of new military infrastructure in the area of operations. Israel also claims that Hizbullah has adapted its modus operandi in order to conceal its activities from UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces, and has relocated its operations mainly to urban areas. UNIFIL has observed that its operational activities are on occasion being closely monitored by unarmed civilians. However, UNIFIL constantly changes its patrolling patterns to maintain the highest level of effectiveness.

27. As I stated in my previous report, ensuring that the area south of the Litani River is free of unauthorized armed personnel, assets and weapons is a long-term endeavour. The rocket firing incidents and attacks against UNIFIL, as reported above and in previous reports (S/2007/392 and S/2007/641), indicate that there are still hostile elements and unauthorized arms, including in the area of operations, which undermine joint efforts to implement resolution 1701 (2006) and constitute a direct threat to peace and security. It is therefore necessary for UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces to further intensify their coordinated efforts, including

through increased controls on the Litani River, to counter any movement of weapons and prevent hostile activities in the area of operations.

28. However, a number of competing requirements on the Lebanese Armed Forces, including in connection with internal security in other parts of the country, combined with limited resources, have placed the Lebanese Armed Forces under increasing strain. I am concerned that this situation may have an effect on the pace of operations of the Lebanese Armed Forces in southern Lebanon in the longer term and, as a consequence, pose new challenges for UNIFIL and the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

29. I reiterate that the support of the international community is necessary to assist the Lebanese Armed Forces in becoming an adequately equipped and capable force to eventually assume effective security responsibility over the current area of operations of UNIFIL. The Army remains a key actor for the long-term sustainability of the arrangements foreseen in resolution 1701 (2006). Even though the operational capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces continues to be enhanced through joint training exercises and coordinated activities with UNIFIL, the pressing need for greater international support in equipment and materiel remains. I am grateful to those Member States that have provided assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces, mainly in the form of military vehicles. Further assistance is needed in connection with the provision of critically needed equipment and materiel to increase the logistical and operational capability of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

30. The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force continued to perform maritime interdiction operations along the Lebanese coast to prevent the entry into Lebanon of unauthorized arms and related materiel. Since the Task Force assumed its mission in mid-October 2006, more than 12,500 ships have been hailed and queried, with close to 70 vessels being identified as suspicious, which subsequently were inspected and cleared by Lebanese naval or customs officials. On 29 January 2008, in response to a distress signal from a Lebanese vessel about 80 kilometres south of Beirut port, the Task Force launched a search and rescue operation, with the assistance of a French naval ship present in the area. All crew members were rescued. Cooperation between the Task Force and the Lebanese navy has further increased and reached a higher degree of effectiveness. Lebanese naval liaison officers continue to be on board the ship commanding the maritime interdiction operations, as well as at UNIFIL headquarters.

31. UNIFIL and Lebanese Armed Forces maritime forces have continued their joint training programme during the reporting period. Maritime training has progressed on both operational and tactical requirements, with the focus being on integrating the Coastal Radar Organization and the capability of the Lebanese navy. Installation of the Coastal Radar Organization and related communications equipment is nearly complete and, following conclusion of necessary training, the Naval Operations Centre in Beirut will be able to maintain a complete and uninterrupted recognized maritime picture of the Lebanese territorial waters. While the improved capabilities of the Lebanese navy will gradually enable it to assume some responsibilities and tasks presently performed by the Maritime Task Force, continued material and technical support will remain critical over the medium to long term.

32. Overall coordination with the Israel Defense Forces has been good, and UNIFIL maintains a liaison office with two officers at the Israel Defense Forces

Northern Command headquarters in Zefat. I am pleased to report that progress has been made towards the establishment of a UNIFIL office in Tel Aviv, which should be operational within the coming period.

33. The attitude of the local population in southern Lebanon remained generally positive towards UNIFIL throughout the reporting period. UNIFIL continues to maintain close relations with local communities, and provides humanitarian assistance, including medical and dental services, veterinary assistance, limited engineering support and unexploded ordnance identification and disposal. The Force has designed a community outreach strategy to ensure that its mandate is clearly understood by the local population, and to best respond to its concerns. As part of this effort, military and civilian personnel maintain regular contacts with the local authorities and community leaders, and utilize the Mission's public information products such as television spots, documentaries, photographic exhibitions and a bimonthly magazine in this regard. In addition, the UNIFIL civil-military cooperation and civil affairs components implement quick-impact projects for the benefit of local communities, funded from the Mission's budget, as well as by troop-contributing countries. Such projects remain essential for UNIFIL to build confidence and support with the local population. Good relations with the local population are critical, if UNIFIL is to successfully implement resolution 1701 (2006).

C. Disarming armed groups

34. According to the Government of Israel, Hizbullah has continued to construct new facilities and carry out training north of the Litani River and in the Bekaa valley, where the Government of Lebanon has exclusive responsibility for security. Hizbullah has not challenged allegations regarding the development of military facilities north of the Litani River and has publicly announced that it will use its arsenal against Israel if provoked.

35. The Government of Israel claims that Hizbullah has adapted its weaponry and tactics so as to take into account the UNIFIL presence south of the Litani River, and maintains that the location of Hizbullah facilities puts its military force within range to fire rockets at Israel. In addition to information provided in previous reports, the Government of Israel states that Hizbullah's arsenal includes some 10,000 long-range rockets, in addition to some 20,000 short-range rockets, deployed both north and south of the Litani River. Hizbullah has denied allegations regarding the transfer of weapons into the area south of the Litani River and states that it continues to respect the requirements of resolution 1701 (2006) in this regard.

36. There is great concern because of reports that Hizbullah is rearming, which would pose serious challenges to the sovereignty, stability and independence of Lebanon and the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

37. In my previous report, I highlighted the threat to the stability and sovereignty of Lebanon posed by non-Lebanese armed groups. I will report to the Council on this in more detail in my next report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004).

38. Mindful of the provision of paragraph 10 of resolution 1701 (2006) regarding disarmament, I continue to believe that the disarmament of Hizbullah and other

militias should take place through a Lebanese-led political process that will bring full restoration of the authority of the Government of Lebanon over all its territory so that there will be no weapons without the consent of the Government of Lebanon and no authority other than that of the Government of Lebanon. While the disarmament of armed groups remains a central issue of the political debate in Lebanon, I regret to note that the persistent deterioration of the political climate and the prolonged deadlock have not been conducive to addressing the issue meaningfully at the national level.

D. Arms embargo

39. In my last report to the Council on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), I drew attention to alleged breaches of the arms embargo across the border between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic and the claimed transfer of sophisticated weaponry from the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Syrian Arab Republic across this border. In its letter dated 10 December 2007 (S/2007/724), the Syrian Arab Republic countered those claims and maintained that allegations of weapons smuggling across the Syrian-Lebanese border were motivated by political rather than security considerations. However, Hizbullah, by admission of its leaders on several occasions, has replenished its military capacity since the 2006 war with Israel. I therefore remain concerned that this border remains vulnerable to such breaches, which would represent serious violations of the resolution and constitute a significant threat to the stability and security of Lebanon.

40. The Lebanese Armed Forces continues its deployment along, and monitoring of, this border in order to prevent such breaches. This presence has, however, been somewhat reduced owing to the increased operational demands placed on the Lebanese Armed Forces to address various security challenges in other parts of the country. However, this has been partially offset by the deployment of additional troops from the Internal Security Forces.

41. Also of continuing concern are the heavily armed military positions maintained by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada along the same border. Their existence poses a direct and continuing challenge to the sovereignty of the Lebanese State inasmuch as it affords both groups de facto control of a stretch of the Lebanese border with the Syrian Arab Republic. The Lebanese Armed Forces continues to maintain a defensive line around both of these military camps.

42. The Government of Lebanon has maintained efforts to enhance its capacity to secure the borders of the country. In my last report to the Council, I noted the initial progress achieved by the Government of Lebanon, with assistance from the international community, towards implementing some of the recommendations of the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team. I am pleased to note that since my last report, there has been some progress towards meeting some of the key recommendations of the Assessment Team through the ongoing process of strengthening Lebanon's border management capacity in the context of the German-led pilot project in northern Lebanon.

43. The Lebanese Common Border Force, which has brought together the four main Lebanese security agencies for the purposes of the pilot project, began ground operations in the period between December 2007 and January 2008. The area of

operations of the force is approximately 130 kilometres along the northern border of Lebanon with the Syrian Arab Republic and has a depth of approximately 20 kilometres into Lebanese territory. The force, headed by a general from the Lebanese Armed Forces, is comprised of three teams, each responsible for a specific sector of the area of operations. Each team is comprised of approximately 130 Lebanese army soldiers, 50 members of the Internal Security Forces, 10 staff from General Security and 10 from the customs authorities. These teams patrol the area of responsibility through mobile patrols and a number of fixed observation points. Ground operations are coordinated from the recently established common operations room situated in the Tripoli headquarters of the Lebanese army command for northern Lebanon. While the force has come across incidents of smuggling, these cases have been minor and only concern the smuggling of diesel fuel and other non-lethal material. To date, the force has not discovered any case of smuggling of weapons in its area of operations.

44. The Lebanese authorities have also taken the first steps towards relocating the key northern border crossing point of Aboudieh from its current position of one kilometre south of the borderline to a location along the Nahr al-Kabir river, which denotes the border itself. This measure will reduce the possibilities for diversionary routes and illicit cross-border activity. I am also pleased to note the significant efforts of the customs authorities to further update and enhance the computerization of their tracking and control mechanisms with support from the international community.

45. Throughout the reporting period, international donors have continued to make available technical expertise and equipment as part of a process to build Lebanon's capacity in the area of border management. A key aspect of strengthening such capacity has been the extensive and ongoing training programme that is being made available to all members of the approximately 800-strong Lebanese Common Border Force.

46. Notwithstanding these initial accomplishments, efforts by Lebanon to improve border security are in their early stages, and much remains to be done. Although the Common Border Force has begun ground operations, further development of its command and control, mobility, communications and operating procedures is required. Consequently, the force has yet to achieve its full operational capacity. A key challenge in this regard will be to ensure the continued integration of the four security agencies that comprise the force. Accordingly, continued efforts will be required by the Lebanese authorities to ensure a greater degree of procedural and operational standardization within the context of the pilot project. The installation and rehabilitation of certain physical infrastructure is also ongoing, and will be required to support the full operation of a number of the force's observation and gathering points throughout its area of responsibility. Also of key importance is the urgent delivery of the remaining necessary technical and telecommunications equipment to the Lebanese authorities that will serve to enhance further the operation capacity and effectiveness of the force. I believe it is now time to capitalize and expand on the important initial accomplishments of the project and to further enhance the capacity of the Common Border Force.

47. Despite progress on certain aspects of enhancing border management, I am concerned that the continuing political crisis and the deteriorating security situation have also presented additional demands on the security forces and challenges to this

endeavour. Key aspects of the recommendations of the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team, which are essential to enhancing security arrangements along the border, remain to be implemented. In accordance with the request of the Security Council contained in its presidential statement of 3 August 2007 (S/PRST/2007/19), and with a view to thoroughly assessing the implementation of the recommendations of the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team and updating the Council, during the next reporting period I intend to dispatch a team to Lebanon to carry out an assessment. The visit will be arranged in coordination with the Government of Lebanon.

48. Another important aspect to be considered in the context of developing a border security regime is the need to accelerate the pace of socio-economic development in Lebanese border regions, in order to provide the communities of these areas with a viable economic alternative to smuggling and illicit cross-border trade. I call on the international community to support the efforts of the Government of Lebanon to extend and enhance such development activity.

49. The Syrian Arab Republic has reiterated that it has doubled the number of border guards on its side of the border, as I first noted in my report dated 14 March 2007 (S/2007/147). The Syrian Arab Republic has also noted that it has requested technical equipment to assist with the monitoring of its borders and training for Syrian personnel, but it has yet to receive a definitive response in this regard. Furthermore, the Syrian Arab Republic has provided information about 17 meetings between Syrian and Lebanese officials held during the period 6 December 2005 to 29 August 2007, whereby practical issues related to smuggling, customs and access of farmers to lands on either side of the border have been discussed. However, for the reasons indicated in paragraph 39 above, I reiterate my call on the Syrian Arab Republic to extend its support and cooperation to a bilateral process with the Government of Lebanon to manage their common border, an objective that is of mutual benefit for both countries.

E. Landmines and cluster bombs

50. Since the end of the 2006 conflict, the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre-South Lebanon has coordinated the clearance and reduction of 33 million square metres of contaminated land, comprising 44 per cent of the surface and 25 per cent of the sub-surface areas, through a joint effort including the Lebanese Armed Forces, UNIFIL, the United Nations and bilaterally funded clearance organizations. In total, 140,362 cluster munitions have been located and destroyed. When operational planning began after the war, the size of the problem was estimated at some 32 million square metres, which has now increased to 38.7 million square metres to date. During the reporting period, the Mine Action Coordination Centre identified 12 additional cluster bomb strike locations, bringing the total to 963 locations recorded thus far.

51. Unexploded ordnance, particularly cluster munitions, continues to maim and kill civilians in southern Lebanon, with an average of two civilian casualties per month. Since the end of the 2006 conflict to date, unexploded ordnance and cluster munitions combined have led to 27 civilian fatalities and 209 civilian injuries, as well as 14 mine clearance fatalities (including one UNIFIL peacekeeper) and 34 mine clearance injuries.

F. Abducted soldiers and prisoners

52. I regret to report that there has been no progress on the humanitarian aspects of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), specifically the issues of the abducted Israeli soldiers and Lebanese prisoners. Hizbullah continues to refuse to provide any information on the release or fate of the abducted soldiers, Udi Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, and places conditions and demands for their release that are far outside of the scope of resolution 1701 (2006).

53. Increased rhetoric during the past months and recent events have not been conducive to reaching a breakthrough in the negotiations. Public remarks by the Secretary-General of Hizbullah regarding the remains of Israeli soldiers in Lebanon from the 2006 war have equally not contributed to the desired humanitarian solution.

G. Delineation of borders

54. In pursuance of the implementation of paragraph 10 of resolution 1701 (2006) on border delineation between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, I have continued to call on Governments of both countries to reach an agreement on their common border. The Government of Lebanon has continued to express its readiness to move forward with the delineation of the border. The Government of Syria affirms that the demarcation of borders is a bilateral sovereign matter that should be resolved between the Syrian and Lebanese Governments. In its letter dated 10 December 2007 (S/2007/724), the Syrian Arab Republic restated its readiness "to begin demarcating the Syrian-Lebanese border, starting from the north for practical reasons, namely, that the southern part of this common border is under Israeli occupation". I urge both Governments to take practical steps without delay towards achieving this goal in accordance with resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1680 (2006).

55. The reactivation of the Lebanese-Syrian border committee, as suggested by President Assad at my meeting with him on 24 April 2007, would be a step in the right direction. Syrian official assertions regarding meetings of Syrian and Lebanese border control officials and information it has provided on 17 meetings to date are not a substitute for activating the Lebanese-Syrian border committee, since those meetings did not address issues of border determination but, rather, smuggling and customs-related issues. I again call on the Governments of the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon to take steps urgently, in keeping with international law, to reach an agreement on their common border.

56. In my previous report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), I provided a provisional definition of the Shab'a Farms area based on the best available information. The Syrian Arab Republic has yet to respond to my specific request for documents, as outlined in my letter of 3 October 2007, which would assist the precise plotting of the geographic coordinates of the relevant line. In addition, there has been no official reaction on the provisional definition of the cartographer by the Governments of Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel. I encourage them to submit such reactions to the Secretariat.

57. In the same report I indicated that I intended to consult with all the relevant parties and members of the Security Council on further developments. I also expressed my intention to follow up directly with the Government of the Syrian

Arab Republic on the communication dated 9 August 2007 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Spain. I have carried out such consultations, but am unable to report any progress. While the Government of Lebanon stands fast on its proposal contained in its seven-point plan of August 2006, the Government of Israel maintains that the Shab'a Farms issue is one that should be addressed between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. The Syrian Arab Republic continues to maintain that it would only demarcate the border with Lebanon in this area following an Israeli withdrawal. I will continue my diplomatic efforts in this regard, in the framework of Prime Minister Siniora's seven-point plan, and will report to the Council on any progress thereof. However, I reiterate that progress on this issue cannot be separated from the principles and elements required for the permanent ceasefire and long-term solution identified in resolution 1701 (2006).

III. Security and safety of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

58. During the reporting period, UNIFIL faced another direct attack and a number of security threats. On 8 January 2008, an improvised explosive device was detonated by remote control as a UNIFIL vehicle passed by on the main coastal highway connecting Beirut to southern Lebanon, outside the town of Sidon. The explosion caused minor injuries to two Irish peacekeepers and material damage to the United Nations vehicle in which they were travelling. The Lebanese authorities and UNIFIL immediately launched an investigation into the incident. This was the third attack against UNIFIL since the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006), in addition to other failed attacks against the Mission, on which I have previously reported (see S/2007/392 and S/2007/641). This latest attack was perpetrated outside the area of operations along UNIFIL's main supply route with the Lebanese capital.

59. Investigations by both Lebanese and Spanish national authorities into the 24 June 2007 attack against UNIFIL, which killed six peacekeepers serving with the Spanish contingent, are ongoing. To date, no one has claimed responsibility for this attack and the perpetrators remain unknown. The Lebanese national authorities also continued their investigation into the 16 July 2007 attack against a UNIFIL military police vehicle from the Tanzanian contingent and have informed UNIFIL that one of the suspected perpetrators is under arrest.

60. Against this background of terrorist attacks against UNIFIL and in the light of continuous threats from some militant groups, including Al-Qaeda, the security and safety of UNIFIL personnel remains a matter of particular concern. Notwithstanding the obligation of all parties to respect the safety and security of UNIFIL and the responsibility of the Government of Lebanon for internal law and order, UNIFIL continues to focus on mitigating risks to its personnel, assets and installations through infrastructure enhancement projects, information analysis, and the acquisition of electronic countermeasures to jam explosive devices and micro-unmanned aerial vehicles. The unmanned aerial vehicles are to be utilized at the discretion of the Force Commander as an additional risk-mitigating asset to enhance Force protection and civilian staff security.

61. The investigative capacity of UNIFIL has been strengthened through the deployment of forensic experts. A planned international military police component will further augment the investigative capacity of the Mission, including forensic

capabilities. Troop-contributing countries have been approached to enhance UNIFIL intelligence capabilities through the establishment of a Joint Mission Analysis Centre, and the deployment of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance units.

IV. Deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

62. UNIFIL continues to maintain a high level of operational readiness. As of 25 February 2008, the total strength of UNIFIL amounted to 12,707 military personnel. The Finnish, Irish and Qatari contingents completed their assignments during the reporting period; however, Ireland and Qatar retain staff officers at UNIFIL headquarters. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations is engaged with troop-contributing countries in identifying replacement troops to ensure that UNIFIL remains adequately resourced. The current strength and deployment of the Force enables the troops to carry out their mandated tasks effectively throughout the area of operations. UNIFIL is currently supported by 51 United Nations Truce Supervision Organization military observers of the Observer Group Lebanon. In addition, a total of 313 international and 612 national staff members currently serve in UNIFIL.

63. The Maritime Task Force comprises four out of five required frigates and seven out of ten required corvettes/patrol boats. The number of frigates and patrol boats should not drop further, if the Task Force is to accomplish its current tasks. A ship-to-task analysis to ensure that the UNIFIL naval assets are optimally equipped to carry out their maritime tasks is being finalized. At the end of February 2008, Germany will hand over leadership of the Task Force to the European Maritime Force (EUROMARFOR), a southern European naval initiative composed of France, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

64. A comprehensive review of the Strategic Military Cell, which was requested by the General Assembly, is currently being finalized.

V. Observations

65. More than a year and a half since the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006) the deployment and activities of both UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces have contributed to the longest period of relative stability in southern Lebanon for many years and have helped to establish a new strategic environment in the area south of the Litani River. These effects are also felt in northern Israel and acknowledged by the Israeli authorities. However, a number of incidents that have occurred over the reporting period and have raised tensions in the area of operations of UNIFIL are a cause for concern. I am also concerned by the threats of open war against Israel made by the Secretary-General of Hizbullah on 14 and 22 February 2008 following the funeral of Imad Mughniyeh, assassinated on 13 February in Damascus. This rhetoric goes against the spirit and intentions of resolution 1701 (2006), which aims to achieve a permanent ceasefire. I call upon all parties to exercise the utmost restraint and to continue to abide by their stated commitments to resolution 1701 (2006).

66. The repercussions of the continuing political crisis in Lebanon, which has shut down the work of key State institutions, are also significant for the implementation

of resolution 1701 (2006). Those institutions, and the accompanying process of a national dialogue, need to be revived in order to achieve further and sustained progress on the implementation of provisions of resolution 1701 (2006). During my visit to Lebanon on 15 and 16 November 2007, I encouraged all parties to spare no efforts to find a solution to the crisis for the sake of the future of their country. On 17 December, I chaired a ministerial meeting in Paris attended by Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, France, the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Portugal (European Union Presidency), the European Commission and the European Union High Representative, Javier Solana, which issued a statement of strong support for Lebanon and its people. My representatives on the ground, especially my Special Coordinator for Lebanon, have worked to narrow the gap between the parties' positions. In addition, the United Nations continues to support regional and international initiatives seeking a peaceful solution to the crisis.

67. I am grateful to the 28 troop-contributing countries which, through their participation in UNIFIL, have enabled the Force to discharge its mandate over the reporting period. I emphasize once again the need for continued support to UNIFIL, including the commitment to contribute the necessary troops and assets to enable the Force to efficiently perform all of its mandated activities on land and at sea. I wish to strongly commend the UNIFIL Force Commander and the military and civilian peacekeeping personnel who continue to play a critical role in helping to promote peace and stability in southern Lebanon. At the same time, I remain extremely concerned for the safety and security of United Nations personnel and urge all parties to abide by their obligation to respect their safety and security.

68. The incidents that have occurred during the reporting period have raised tensions, and undermined the Mission's efforts to build trust and confidence between the parties and with the population of southern Lebanon. I would like to underline the obligations of the parties to fully respect the cessation of hostilities, and to prevent any violation of resolution 1701 (2006).

69. I am concerned that Israeli air violations continue unabated, often without any regard for the levels of tension and anger that these actions trigger on the ground. These repeated violations of resolution 1701 (2006) undermine the credibility of the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL in the eyes of the local population and, in doing so, impede the ability of UNIFIL to carry out its mandate.

70. The continued occupation by the Israel Defense Forces of the northern part of the village of Ghajar constitutes a continuing violation of Lebanon's sovereignty, resolution 1701 (2006) and the Blue Line. I call upon the Governments of Lebanon and Israel to work with the Force Commander of UNIFIL to arrive at an agreement that would ensure the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces south of the Blue Line, with due consideration for the legitimate humanitarian concerns of the population.

71. I remain concerned about ongoing reports and Hizbullah public statements that point to breaches of the arms embargo, in serious violation of resolution 1701 (2006). All Member States in the region, in particular the Syrian Arab Republic and the Islamic Republic of Iran, have a key responsibility in this regard. Such violations risk further destabilizing Lebanon and the whole region.

72. Effective border management is a key imperative for ensuring the security and stability of Lebanon. Achieving this will be a long-term endeavour that must continue to be led by the Lebanese authorities with sustained international support and expertise. In the course of the next reporting period, with a view to thoroughly assessing the implementation of the recommendations of the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team, I intend to dispatch a team to Lebanon to carry out an assessment. I am encouraged by the determination demonstrated by the Government of Lebanon to improve its capacity in this regard, and in particular by its commitment to the success of the pilot project along its northern border with the Syrian Arab Republic. Yet it is clear that significant challenges remain to be addressed. The Syrian Arab Republic has a shared responsibility in controlling its borders with Lebanon and implementing paragraph 15 of resolution 1701 (2006).

73. I urge the Governments of the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon to take practical steps without delay towards demarcating their common border in accordance with resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1680 (2006). I will continue my diplomatic efforts on the issue of the Shab'a Farms area.

74. Following persistent efforts by the United Nations both at Headquarters and in the field to secure technical strike data regarding cluster munitions, on 5 February 2008, the Israel Defense Forces submitted some information. Preliminary findings are however that the information provided is of very limited value. I reiterate with urgency my call on the Government of Israel to provide detailed strike data on the type, quantity and specific coordinates of submunitions fired during the 2006 conflict. This crucial information would greatly enhance the rate of clearance operations in southern Lebanon and reduce the number of incidents for both civilians and mine-clearance experts.

75. I reiterate the firm demand of the international community for the parties to redouble their efforts, in coordination with the facilitator, to urgently reach a solution to the issue of the abducted Israeli soldiers and Lebanese prisoners and comply with the humanitarian demands of resolution 1701 (2006).

76. With reference to paragraph 6 of resolution 1701 (2006), I thank those Member States that have already provided assistance for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon and I urge the international community to further support the calls of the Government of Lebanon in this respect. In addition, as the backbone for the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and a key instrument for peace and stability in Lebanon, the Lebanese Armed Forces need and merit the continued and enhanced support of the international community, in both equipment and training.

77. It continues to be my profound conviction that we must continue to exert all possible efforts to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). This and the full territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon remain interdependent.

78. Finally, I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Geir Pedersen of Norway, upon the completion of his tour of duty in Lebanon, for his leadership and devotion in carrying out the important work of the United Nations in Lebanon. I wish him success in any future endeavours.

Annex

Military component of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon as at 25 February 2008[a]

Country	*Military component deployed in UNIFIL*		
	Staff officers	*Troops*	*Total*
Belgium	5	359	364
China	8	335	343
Croatia	1	0	1
Cyprus	2	0	2
France	22	1 434	1 456
Germany	7	534	541
Ghana	19	849	868
Greece	3	280	283
Guatemala	1	0	1
Hungary	4	0	4
India	13	869	882
Indonesia	7	850	857
Italy	33	2 561	2 594
Ireland	7	0	7
Korea	3	359	362
Luxembourg	0	2	2
Malaysia	7	360	367
Nepal	9	850	859
Netherlands	1	145	146
Poland	8	481	489
Portugal	5	141	146
Slovenia	0	14	14
Spain	15	1 119	1 134
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	1	0	1
Turkey	3	904	907
United Republic of Tanzania	2	75	77
Total	**186**	**12 521**	**12 707**

[a] UNIFIL is also currently supported by 51 UNTSO military observers of the Observer Group Lebanon. In the Department of Peacekeeping Operations at Headquarters, the Strategic Military Cell is currently composed of 28 staff officers.